

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 360 672

CS 508 260

AUTHOR Stahle, Renee Beth; McGukin, J. Drew
TITLE Communication Is Not Supposed To Be This Hard: A Survey on the Status of Instruction in the Undergraduate Communication Theory Course.
PUB DATE Apr 93
NOTE 27p.; Paper presented at the Joint Meeting of the Southern States Communication Association and the Central States Communication Association (Lexington, KY, April 14-18, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication (Thought Transfer); Communication Research; *Course Content; Higher Education; National Surveys; *Teaching Methods; Textbook Selection; Undergraduate Study
IDENTIFIERS Educational Issues

ABSTRACT

A study assessed the status of the undergraduate general communication theory course at small and large colleges. Questionnaires were mailed to 261 programs in the United States listing a communication theory course in their catalogues. A total of 62 questionnaires were returned, for a response rate of 24%. Results indicated: (1) a clear preference for surveying many theories and providing alternative perspectives and knowledge about the discipline; (2) applying and analyzing theories; (3) choosing textbooks on the basis of the theories covered and readability of the text; and (4) using lecture and discussion. There was little agreement, however, on which theories and/or theorists should be covered. This lack of agreement raises larger issues about the status of the communication discipline and what it does or should mean for students to be literate and appropriately socialized into the communication discipline. (Four tables of data are included; 19 references are attached.) (Author/RS)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED 360 672

Communication is Not Supposed to be This Hard:
A Survey on the Status of Instruction in the Undergraduate
Communication Theory Course

Renee Beth Stahle
Department of Communication Arts
Aquinas College
Grand Rapids, MI 49506

J. Drew McGukin
Department of Speech Communication
California University of Pennsylvania
California, PA 15419

Running Head: Undergraduate Communication Theory Course

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official
OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Renee Stahle

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Abstract

Given the calls for and concerns about the status of theory instruction in the communication discipline, the purpose of this study was to more systematically assess the status of the undergraduate communication theory course at small and large colleges. A national survey found a clear preference for surveying many theories and providing alternative perspectives and knowledge about the discipline; applying and analyzing theories; choosing textbooks on the basis of the theories covered and readability of the text; and the use of lecture and discussion. There was little agreement, however, on which theories and/or theorists should be covered. This lack of agreement raises larger issues about the status of the communication discipline and what it does or should mean for students to be literate and appropriately socialized into the communication discipline.

Communication is Not Supposed to be This Hard:
A Survey on the Status of Instruction in the Undergraduate
Communication Theory Course

Along with the emergence of the communication discipline has come continued discussion on the state of scientific inquiry in the discipline (c.f., Berger, 1991; Berger & Chaffee, 1987; Dervin, Grossberg, O'Keefe, & Wartella, 1989ab; Gerbner, 1983). One aspect of that discussion has been the status of theory and research methods instruction in the discipline. Smitter and MacDoniels (1985) in their survey of undergraduate communication curricula at sixty-one small colleges found that few upper division courses were required, only ten programs required any sort of upper division theory course and little similarity existed among the theory courses that were offered. Smitter and MacDoniels (1985) suggested the development of a common core of requirements that all communication majors enrolled at a small college should take with uniformity in both course titles and course descriptions. The 1986 Hope College Essential Curriculum Conference further recommended that theory and research methods be the capstone courses in a small college communication curriculum. In 1991 the Speech Communication Association (SCA) also suggested that theory, research and methodology courses be part of a basic introduction to communication. There is some evidence that the recommendations for communication methodology and theory courses have been adopted.

Frey and Botan (1988) conducted a survey on the status of instruction in introductory undergraduate communication research

methods courses. They concluded that the course is rapidly growing and that there is general agreement about the purpose, content, problems and plans for it. The status of instruction in the undergraduate communication theory course is less clear.

The Smitter and MacDoniels' (1985) study and more recent comments by Berger (1991) suggest a lack of theory instruction. Berger (1991) attempted to identify some reasons and palliatives for the lack of theory in the communication field. One reason he cited is the imbalance between the large number of research methods courses compared to the small number of theory construction courses being taught at a graduate level. This imbalance results in a preoccupation with methodology and a lack of familiarity with even the basic notions of theory and theory construction. One possible palliative Berger suggests is making instruction in theory development an integral part of the graduate experience. Such instruction should not focus on various substantive theories relevant to communication inquiry but on explanation of key concepts, alternative approaches to the explanation of communication action, explication of theoretical constructs, and theory construction and evaluation (Berger, 1991:109). One interpretation of Berger's remarks is that an undergraduate theory course should focus on various substantive theories and a graduate theory course on concepts, approaches, explications, construction and evaluation.

Another view is that communication theory instruction is alive and well and growing. The SCA (1991) reports that nineteen

percent of the new academic positions created during the late 1980s were Communication Theory positions. Frey and Botan (1988: 250) state in the rationale for their study that, "Graduate students typically receive instruction in both communication theory and research methods. At the undergraduate level, however, the preponderance of communication theory, as compared to research methods, texts and chapters ..." Both the SCA (1981) report and Frey and Botan's (1988) observations suggest that theory instruction has increased. Stahle's (1992) analysis of course catalog descriptions lends further support for the growth of and agreement about the undergraduate communication theory course. The communication theory course is being offered and required in a growing number of departments. There is consistency in course titles with 'Communication Theory' being the most common description and consistency in course objectives and content with a survey of substantive, contextual and contemporary theories being the most common description. Another view of the undergraduate communication theory course, then, is that there is uniformity in the course titles and general content.

While the undergraduate research methods course is growing and congealing, the status of communication theory instruction remains unclear. There are different viewpoints on the status of the course. Of the two studies that were conducted, Smither and MacDoniels (1985) studied only small colleges and Stahle (1992) investigated course descriptions. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine the current status of instruction in the undergraduate general (as opposed to rhetorical, mass

communication) communication theory course at U.S. colleges and universities. More specifically, the following questions were investigated:

1. What is the status of the undergraduate communication theory course in regards to:
 - a. the rationale for the course?
 - b. the approaches to the course?
 - c. the learning goals for the course?
 - d. the selection criteria for textbooks?
 - e. the topics covered in the course?
 - f. the instructional methods and materials used in the course?
2. Is there consistency in the rationale, approaches, learning goals, textbook selection criteria, topics and instructional methods and materials used in the undergraduate communication theory course?

METHODS

The questionnaire used to collect the data for this study was developed from a content analysis of current communication theory textbooks and the authors' experience in teaching the course. A prior draft of the questionnaire was completed and critiqued by colleagues who teach the course. A tri-focus questionnaire resulted; one section asking for responses from programs which did not currently offer any form of undergraduate communication theory, one asking for responses from programs which offered a lower division course and one asking for

responses from programs which offered an upper division course.

A fourth section of the questionnaire asked for demographic information about the school, department and staffing of the undergraduate communication theory course. Programs which did not offer it were asked why not and whether they had offered or planned to offer a communication theory course. Programs which offered the communication theory course were asked about general course information, course objectives, approaches to the course, course content, instructional methods/materials, course assignments and problems.

SAMPLE

Questionnaires were mailed to the 261 programs in the United States that Stahle (1992) identified as listing a communication theory course in their catalogues. Sixty-two questionnaires were returned for a return rate of 24 percent. Ten programs indicated that they did not offer an undergraduate communication theory course. Fourteen programs indicated that they offered only a lower division course, 39 that they offered only an upper division course and 15 that they offered both upper and lower division courses. The total number of lower division courses was 29 and the total number of upper division courses was 54.

The returned questionnaires were from a mix of large and small schools and regions of the country. Forty of the returned questionnaires were from programs designated as large; enrollments of 3001 or above or more than seven full time faculty members in the program. Twenty-two of the returned questionnaires were from programs designated as small; enrollments of 3000 or below

or six or fewer full time faculty members in the program. Respondents were asked to indicate to which of the four communication regions their school belonged: Central, 24; Eastern, 14; Southern, 13; Western, 11.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Many of the responses for both large and small programs and lower and upper division courses were equivalent. Therefore, the results have been collapsed and specific exceptions noted.

Rationale

The rationale for teaching the undergraduate communication theory course is to provide a foundation at 20 (29%) of the schools who offer upper level courses and 13 (19%) of the schools who offer lower level courses; a capstone at 33 (47%) of the schools; and research or graduate preparation at 4 (6%) of the schools. The results show that close to half of the programs offer the undergraduate communication theory course as a foundation course and close to half as a capstone course.

Approaches

Three questions from the survey dealt with approaches to the course. First, respondents were asked to select from and rank their overall approach to the course from among the following:

Alternative perspectives: theories are used to illustrate the various ways one can investigate and examine communication activities and events.

Application and analysis: learn how to use existing theories to explain actual communication events.

History of the discipline: survey of the historical development of the communication discipline and introduction to major theorists and ideas in communication.

Inquiry: understand the nature of theory and how theories are developed and used to develop the ability to read and evaluate the theoretical literature.

Integrated concepts: provides a general framework for organizing the communication concepts covered in other courses.

Survey of theories: overview of communication theories and communication theorists; introduce and provide an overview to areas of the field and contexts of communication.

Theory construction: understand the process of theorizing to be able to develop new theoretical explanations of communication events.

The results are reported in Table 1. The top-ranked approaches to the communication theory course were survey of theories, application and analysis and alternative perspectives.

Table 1

Ranking of Approaches to the Course

Approaches	Ranking						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Survey of theories	19	6	5	7	6	6	2
Application and analysis	12	16	11	5	5	3	-
Alternative perspectives	10	9	10	7	1	4	6
Integrated concepts	9	8	7	10	7	5	1
History of the discipline	4	6	5	5	5	9	14
Inquiry	4	5	9	9	10	13	10
Theory construction	1	5	4	4	10	6	13

The middle-ranked approaches to the communication theory course were concepts, history and inquiry. The lowest-ranked approach was theory construction. The responses indicate that students are being exposed to a survey of theories and alternative perspectives with their critical thinking skills being developed as they do application and analysis.

Respondents were also asked what the best approach would be to organize the coverage of different theories. Forty-three percent of the respondents preferred to organize the theories using a metatheoretical (laws, rules, systems) approach, 37% using a contexts (interpersonal, group, etc.) approach, and 21% using a problems of communication approach. Again, the responses suggest that there is a preference for metatheoretical or alternative perspectives.

Third, respondents were asked to indicate the best approach to theory coverage. In small and large programs with their lower division courses, an overview of many theories (24, 32%) was preferred to an in-depth coverage of a few theories (14, 20%). In large programs with their upper division courses the preference was for in-depth coverage of a few theories (16, 24%) rather than an overview of many theories (13, 19%). The preference for an overview of many theories supports the overall approach of surveying many theories. The exception for in-depth coverage in upper division courses in large programs may be explained by the presence of a lower division course(s) that survey many theories.

In the approaches to the undergraduate communication theory course the responses show a preference for an overview/survey of many theories, coverage of alternative perspectives and metatheories and application and analysis.

Learning Goals

One of the key decisions in teaching an undergraduate communication theory course is whether the learning goals should focus on knowledge of communication (major theories and/or the discipline) and/or communication skills (critical thinking, research, and/or writing). The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Ranking of Course Learning Goals

Goals	Ranking					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Increase knowledge theory	29	5	11	2	--	--
Increase knowledge discipline	15	16	8	4	4	3
Critical thinking	6	14	10	8	4	--
Research skills	4	4	6	10	11	11
Communication skills	3	2	4	5	5	15
Writing skills	1	2	3	13	19	5

The top-ranked learning goal for the course was to increase knowledge of major theories. The second ranked topic was to increase knowledge of the discipline. The middle-ranked

learning goal was to develop critical thinking skills with research, developing/improving communication, and writing skills ranking lower as learning goals for the course. The top-ranked learning goals suggest that the major goal of the course is to increase students' knowledge about communication theories and the discipline. Developing critical thinking skills may go hand in hand with knowledge in analyzing and applying communication theories and larger communication concerns in the discipline.

The lower rankings of communication, research and writing skills is understandable in light of the foundational/capstone status, prerequisites for, and typical problems with the communication theory course. When the undergraduate communication theory course serves as a foundational course, students would not be expected to have specific communication knowledge and skills. When respondents were asked to list the official prerequisite courses for communication theory, 22 (25%) responded that an introduction to communication course was required, 22 (25%) that a lower level communication theory course was required and 20 (23%) that a research course or project was required. Twenty-five (25%) responded that public speaking was a prerequisite skill and 14 (9%) that students' poor writing skills were a major problem with teaching the course. When the communication theory course is taught at the upper level, it is expected that students will be able to write and speak; will already have or will develop later background in research methods; will increase their knowledge of the communication discipline and communication theory; and will develop their critical thinking skills. The

undergraduate communication theory course typically focuses on knowledge of communication theories and the discipline and on critical thinking skills. The focus on communication skills in the undergraduate communication course varies with the level at which the course is taught.

Criteria for Textbook Selection

Respondents were asked to indicate the three decision criteria they use in choosing a textbook for the communication theory course. The top-ranked criteria were the theories that the textbook covered (36, 31%) and the readability of the textbook (29, 25%). More middle-ranked criteria were depth of coverage (6, .05%), organization (5, .04%), application (4, .03%) and communication examples (4, .03%). Forty-four percent of the criteria received only one or two mentions; history, theory construction, overview of the discipline, philosophical soundness and versatility, accuracy, current, evaluation of individual theories, research methods, supplementary materials, cartoons, semester adaptable, length and price. There is agreement that the theories covered by a textbook are the most important. One major problem in selecting a textbook, readability, is reflected in the second criteria.

Topics

Respondents were asked to indicate the five topics to which a significant amount of instructional time was devoted. The results are presented in Table 3. The top topic in both small and large programs was philosophical perspectives and paradigms.

Table 3.

Topics to which a significant amount of instructional time is devoted

Topics	Frequency	
	Small Schools	Large Schools
Philosophical perspectives/paradigms	10	27
Trends and issues in the discipline	4	22
Functions of a theory	9	18
Basic elements of a theory	8	17
Application of theory building	7	17
Process of theory building	4	13
Theory growth and change	4	13
Creation of knowledge	1	12
Criteria for evaluating theories	8	12
History of the discipline	6	11
Research methods	4	9
Careers in communication	--	1

There was also agreement on the middle-ranked topics of functions of theory, basic elements, and applications of theory building and the lower-ranked topics of the process of theory-building, theoretical growth and change, history, research methods and careers. There were two major differences between small and large programs in the ranking of topics. Trends and issues in the discipline was ranked second by large programs and sixth by small programs. Criteria for evaluation of theories was ranked third by small programs and sixth by large programs.

Methods and Materials

Respondents were asked to rank the methods and materials used in their courses in terms of frequency of use. The results are reported in Table 4. The top-ranked method in the

undergraduate communication theory course was lectures. The

Table 4

Ranking of Course Activities

Activity	Ranking												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Lectures	26	5	2	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Discussions	2	16	2	1	1	-	2	1	-	-	-	-	-
Papers	2	3	12	7	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Films	-	3	5	4	2	4	1	1	-	1	-	-	-
Cases	-	-	2	7	5	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Journals	-	2	1	-	4	-	4	-	2	1	1	-	-
Simulations	-	-	2	1	-	-	-	2	-	3	-	1	-
Role plays	1	1	2	1	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	2	1
Articles	2	-	2	3	-	6	1	2	1	-	-	-	-
Speakers	-	-	-	1	2	1	1	2	-	2	2	-	-
Popular Articles	-	-	1	1	2	-	3	-	3	1	-	-	1
Student Seminars	-	-	3	-	1	-	6	-	-	2	-	1	-
Essay exams	-	5	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

second-ranked topic was instructor led discussions. The two top-ranked topics suggest that the methods used in the course are primarily designed to aid in the understanding of course content. The middle-ranked topics - papers, case studies and films/videos - suggest that understanding and/or analysis of

theories is aided through writing papers and studying case studies and films/videos. The lower-ranked methods - simulations, role plays, speakers, popular articles and student seminars - tended to be used less in the course. The types of methods/materials used in the course may be a function of difficulty in understanding the material, time constraints and the availability of resources. Responses to a question asking about the major problems with the communication theory course, indicated that theory is a difficult course for a variety of reasons; complexity of the material, abstract concepts, poor integration and critical analysis abilities, readability of texts, and lack of student motivation and preparation. Therefore, the methods used most frequently in the course - lecture, discussion, papers, films/videos, case studies - focus on helping students understand, apply and analyze the course material. Methods that are used less frequently - simulations, role plays, and articles - reflect other problems with the course; lack of undergraduate level primary source material, library resources and activities. Instructors may want to use articles and activities but have difficulty locating suitable resources.

Six broad instructional trends are evident in the results; survey of many theories, presentation of alternative perspectives, understanding the communication discipline, analysis and application of theories, theory construction, and course level. In answer to Research Question Two, there is consistency in three of the six instructional trends. First, there is a consistent trend that the course should survey many

theories. The top-ranked learning goal for the course was to increase knowledge of major theories, the top-ranked approach was a survey of theories, the best approach to covering theories was an overview of many theories, and the top and middle-ranked criteria in selecting textbooks were the theories covered and the depth of the theoretical coverage. The preference for lecture, discussion, papers, case studies and videos/films as instructional methods suggests that these are the primary methods through which understanding of the course material takes place.

The second consistent trend is a preference for presenting of alternative perspectives. One of the top-ranked approaches to the course was alternative perspectives, one of the top-ranked approaches to covering theories was metatheoretical perspectives, and the top-ranked topic was philosophical trends.

The third consistent trend is application and analysis of theory. A top-ranked approach was application and analysis. A middle-ranked learning goal was to develop students' critical thinking skills. Two middle-ranked criteria for selecting textbooks were applications and inclusion of communication examples. As a topic covered in the course, critical evaluation was ranked third by small programs and sixth by large programs. Sixty percent of the theory course syllabi sent with the survey assigned an analysis/application paper(s). Analyzing and applying communication theory appears to be a secondary concern in the course.

One trend with mixed results trend was the preference for theory construction. Theory construction was ranked last as an

approach to the course and in the middle as a topic covered in the course. These mixed results may reflect a difference in how theory construction is covered in the course. Having students actually construct a theory may not be a goal of the course. Rather, the course may focus on understanding the components of a theory and what is involved in theory generation and testing. student

Another trend with mixed results is knowledge of the communication discipline. The second-ranked learning goal was to increase knowledge of the discipline and a middle-ranked approach was the history of the discipline. Trends and issues in the discipline was ranked second as content for large programs and sixth for small programs. History of the discipline was ranked low as a topic covered in the course. Knowledge of disciplinary trends and issues is a secondary concern in communication theory courses while history of the discipline is a concern but is not covered in the course. There are three possible explanations for the history results. First, the history of the discipline may be covered in other courses. Second, with everything else that is covered in the course, there just isn't time to also cover history. Last, only the Trenholm (1991) textbook covers the history of the discipline.

A clear trend for which there was inconsistent results is the rationale for the undergraduate communication theory course. Close to half of the schools indicated that they offered communication theory as a foundation course and close to half that they offered it as a capstone course.

The results show that there are consistent preferences for

presenting a survey of communication theories, increasing understanding of the communication discipline and alternative perspectives to theory, and analyzing and applying theories. The coverage of theory construction provided mixed results. The major inconsistency was the near even split in programs that offer the communication theory course as a foundation and/or as a capstone course.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Several conclusions about the status of instruction in the undergraduate communication theory course can be drawn from this study's results. Hope (1986) and the Speech Communication Association (1991) called for the inclusion of a theory course in the communication curriculum. This study suggests that the communication theory course is gaining widespread acceptance in communication programs. The course is being offered and required as a foundation course in close to half of the communication programs and as a capstone course in the other half of the programs. More significantly, some programs are now offering both an introductory and an advanced communication theory course.

There is consistency in the preference for a survey approach to communication theories, increasing understanding of the communication discipline and alternative perspectives to theory, and focusing on analysis and application of theories. The results for coverage of theory construction are mixed. These results echo and/or raise important questions about the material that is and should be covered in the undergraduate communication theory course.

Although there is consistency in general content areas and approaches to the course there may be little by way of a common core of knowledge that communication students receive in the undergraduate theory course. There is a clear preference for surveying many theories and providing alternative perspectives and knowledge about the discipline but which theories, perspectives and what disciplinary knowledge are/should be covered is unclear. Stahle (1992) found a preference in course descriptions for a survey of substantive, contextual and contemporary theories. Berger (1991:102), however, stated that there is, "no particular theoretical core to the field of communication." There is also further evidence that there is no consistent core. One of the survey questions asked respondents to indicate the ten theories or theorists a communication course should cover. Those theories/theorists that received even two or three mentions were Agenda Setting, Aristotle, Attribution, Balance Theory, Behaviorism, Burke, Cognitive Dissonance, Constructivism, Coordinated Management of Meaning, Cultivation, Delia, Derrida, Feminist Theories, Fishbein, Hall, Information Theory, Osgood, Role Theory, Shannon and Weaver, Social Exchange Theory, Social Judgment Theory, Social Learning Theory, Speech Act Theory, Symbolic Interactionism, Uncertainty Reduction Theory, Uses and Gratification and Watzlawick. An informal content analysis conducted by the author of the topics covered in five communication theory textbooks (Griffin, 1991; Infante, Rancer, & Womack, 1990; Littlejohn, 1990; Stacks, Hickson, & Hill, 1991;

Trenholm, 1991). The author found only a small core of theories/theorists that were covered across even three of the textbooks; Coordinated Management of Meaning, Ekman and Friesen, Mehrabian, Sapir and Whorpf, Speech Act Theory, Social Judgment Theory, Uncertainty Reduction Theory, and Weick. There are only four overlaps - Coordinated Management of Meaning, Speech Act Theory, Social Judgment Theory, and Uncertainty Reduction Theory - between the preferences of the respondents and the theories/theorists covered by theory textbooks. There is, then, potentially little commonalty in the theoretical content covered in the communication theory course. The respondent responses and the author found an even a smaller core of common perspectives; laws, rules, systems. Disciplinary knowledge in textbooks consists of defining communication (Griffin, 1991; Infante, Rancer, & Womack, 1990; Littlejohn, 1990; Stacks, Hickson, & Hill, 1991; Trenholm, 1991), history (Trenholm, 1991), uniqueness of human communication (Trenholm, 1991), and future concerns and trends (Stacks, Hickson, & Hill, 1991; Trenholm, 1991). The results indicate that there is potentially little in terms of a common core of theories/theorists, alternative perspectives or disciplinary knowledge that students receive across communication theory courses.

A larger issue related to the results is what does or should it mean for students to be literate in and socialized into the communication discipline (cf., McGugin, 1989). Does/should studying communication require a basic disciplinary literacy analogous to the "cultural literacy" needed to read a newspaper or a novel. What should a communication theory literate student

know or be able to do?

One aspect of literacy is what can/should the undergraduate communication theory course cover. Should the goals of the undergraduate communication theory course concentrate on knowledge (recognition/memorization) of the philosophical approaches and theories/theorists or critical analysis; should students be literate consumers of theory or theory constructors; should students be able to analyze a situation, identify the communication problem, and suggest remedies? Should/can all these objectives be taught in the or one communication theory course?

Related to whether/what students should receive by way of disciplinary literacy, is at what level should various topics and issues be presented. In other social science disciplines like sociology and psychology the first chapters in the introductory course cover the history and founding "fathers" of the discipline. This study suggests that communication students may not receive this background on their discipline or not receive it until an upper level communication theory course. Should the communication theory course be taught at a lower level and provide a background and some elementary analysis, application and consumer skills that students can use as they move through their major? For example, students could learn how to analyze communication problems and suggest remedies or an introduction to system's theory would allow it to be covered more specifically in small group, family, and organizational communication courses. Should an upper level course focus on philosophical underpinnings

and/or theory construction/evaluation or should theory construction be reserved for graduate courses?

Conrad (1990:22) states that the point of socialization is to persuade newcomers to accept the attitudes, behaviors, dominant goals, values, and taken-for-granted assumptions of the organization. There are two possible viewpoints on what constitutes appropriate socialization into the communication discipline.

One view is that students who do not share a common content core are being properly socialized into the discipline because the communication discipline itself is fragmented (Berger, 1991). Maybe there is little in terms of shared concerns, goals, and interests constituted through and reflected in the values, beliefs, and practices of the communication discipline. Therefore whatever common content core communication students receive, may be specific to the major tracks or overall focus of the communication program. Berger (1991) suggests that the fragmentation in the discipline may remain until there is a small set of questions in the field (Berger, 1991). Until that time there may be little agreement concerning what content should be included in the communication theory course or what it

Another view of disciplinary socialization is that students should understand the various historical traditions, philosophical underpinnings, major issues, and disciplinary status of communication. Students should know that communication scholars and definitions of communication present different views of intentionality and/or effectiveness. Students should understand why the laws-rules-systems perspective is an issue in

the discipline and recognize that there are other perspectives like Fisher's and the critical perspective. Students should understand that other disciplines, friends and relatives, and employers have various and contradictory views of the status and worth of the communication discipline.

Clearly the status of the introductory communication theory course needs more research and discussion particularly in terms of what specific theories/theorists, perspectives, and disciplinary knowledge are and should be covered in the course given the time constraints and difficulty of the material. The content covered in the communication theory course also raises larger questions about the communication discipline and what it does or should mean to be literate in and socialized into that discipline.

REFERENCES

- Berger, C. (1991). Communication theories and other curios. Communication Monographs, 58, 101-113.
- Berger, C. & Chaffee, S. (1987). The study of communication as a science. In C. Berger & S. Chaffee (Eds.), Handbook of communication science (pp. 15-19). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Conrad, C. (1990). Strategic organizational communication: An integrated perspective Chicago, IL: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.
- Dervin, B., Grossberg, L., O'Keefe, B., & Wartella, E. (Eds.) (1989a). Rethinking communication vol. 1: Paradigm issues. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Dervin, B., Grossberg, L., O'Keefe, B., & Wartella, E. (Eds.) (1989b). Rethinking communication vol. 2: Paradigm exemplars. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Frey, L. & Botan, C. (1988). The status of instruction in introductory undergraduate communication research methods. Communication Education, 37, 249-256.
- Gerbner, G. (1983). Ed. Ferment in the field [Special issue]. Journal of Communication, 33.
- Griffin, E. (1991). A first look at communication theory. NY: McGraw-Hill, Inc.
- Hirsch, E.D., Jr. (1987). Cultural literacy: What every American needs to know. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Infante, D., Rancer, A., & Womack, D. (1990). Building communication theory. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- Littlejohn, S. (1989). Theories of Human Communication. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

- McGukin, J.D. (1989). Organizational communication literacy: Disciplinary socialization in the organizational communication course. Unpublished manuscript. Department of Speech Communication, California University of Pennsylvania, California, PA.
- Smither, S. & MacDoniels, J. (1985) Approaches to the basic curriculum in small college departments. ACA Bulletin, 34, 49-51.
- Speech Communication Association (1991). Pathways to Careers in Communication. Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association
- Stacks, D., Hickson, M., & Hill, S. (1991). Introduction to communication theory. Chicago, IL: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Stahle, R. (1992, November). A rose is a rose but a communication theory course at small and large colleges is...? Paper presented at the convention of the Speech Communication Association, Chicago, IL
- Trenholm, S. (1991). Human communication theory. 2nd edition, Englewood cliffs, NJ Prentice Hall